

FRENCH INDO-CHINA

Freemasonry

Freemasonry has never attained the heights of influence in China that it enjoyed in France. In 1886, after Bert's death, the Masonic League of Hanoi was founded. By 1905 the Masons had flourished sufficiently to build a new temple upon land given them by their brother, Governor Beau. For many years the importance of the Masons ebbed and flowed according to the favours granted them by the upper administration. While it was true that many granted were Masons, most of them, like Doumer, Klobukowsky, and Merlin, were influenced by other considerations to such an extent that they were considered backsliders by their more ardent colleagues. Lodges exist in all the chief cities of the colony, but the Tonkinese Fraternity has from the outset been the most important. At Hanoi they have founded a library and a recreation hall for natives, where courses in French are given. In 1901 they printed a Masonic newspaper, *FIndochm*

In estimating Freemasonry's influence on official policy in Ixkb~

China, one is faced with serious gaps in documentation. Moreover,

the subject is so fraught with feeling and reticences that the historian is reduced to accepting either its evaluation by the Masons themselves or the appraisal of their enemies. Aside from mutual aid, the Masonic work in the colony has been directed to undermining the Mission*® influence, and to formulating a native policy which would reconcile¹ the principles of Masonry with the exigencies of France's position as the 'Colonizing power. After Yenbay the Tonkinese Masons were prompted to a searching of conscience and a stock-taking of their

activities and responsibilities in regard to natives. They embodied the result of their reflections in a pamphlet sent to their brothers in Paris wfaMi might

perhaps aid in absolving the Tonkinese Lodge and the Indo-Chinese Lodges, in general, from the unjust reproach which for some time has fallen "

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Masonry had allowed colonial psychology to
Masonic sentiments towards their brother : •
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fact. that

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